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Taoreadh  
To see plans  
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Meeting between Northern Ireland Party Representatives  
in Germany

1. A number of representatives of political parties in Northern Ireland met at Duisburg near Dusseldorf in Germany on Friday evening, the 14th, and Saturday morning, the 15th of October, at the invitation of Eberard Speaker, a German national with, I understand, close links to the World Council of Churches. Eberard seems also to be friendly with Cardinal Ó Fiaich and the Rev. John Thompson, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church.
2. The representation present were:
  - Jack Allen, Chairman of the OUP (who stood in, at the last moment, for the Rev. Martin Smyth);
  - Peter Robinson, Deputy Leader of the DUP;
  - Austin Currie of the SDLP; and
  - Gordon Mawhinney, Deputy Leader of the Alliance Party.
3. Fr. Alec Reid was also present in the capacity of someone who could convey the thinking of Sinn Féin. Speaker seemed to have initially envisaged Fr. Denis Faul for this role but, apparently on the advice of the Cardinal, decided to ask Fr. Reid instead.
4. The SDLP had vetoed any Workers Party representation at the meeting.
5. Austin Currie was telephoned about attendance at the meeting by the Cardinal, who had Speaker with him at the time. Currie, with Séan Farren, had attended a similar meeting in Germany with the SDLP about 18 months ago.

6. The meeting, according to Austin Currie, seems to have been rather a discursive one. However, the four party representatives did agree to submit the following proposal, designed to facilitate the opening of political dialogue, to their Party Leaders:

"The meetings of the Conference will not be held for a (specified) period to facilitate dialogue involving the major constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland".

7. It would be the intention of Speaker to approach Dublin and London on the above.
8. Currie made the point, in relation to the above, that there had been considerable agreement on the need to avoid the use of the term suspension if the proposal was to get anywhere and he felt, therefore, that there would be considerable flexibility on how it might be put into practice. One possibility, for instance, was that the two Governments, at the end of a Conference, could announce the next meeting for six weeks or so in advance. This would then enable Unionists to enter into talks during this specific period in the knowledge that they would not be interrupted by any meetings of the Conference.
9. In addition to the above, the Unionists had argued that the Joint Secretaries should be absent from Maryfield on the day that formal talks between the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland parties took place.
10. Currie said that the phrase in the agreed recommendation, "involving the major political constitutional parties in Northern Ireland", had been deliberately drafted to allow for parallel talks between the Unionists and the Government here. In this regard, Robinson had said that he accepted

the idea of "parallel or twin-track - or whatever phrase you like to use - talks". He added that Paisley did not agree with him, as he continued to be firmly opposed to any talks with Dublin until a Northern Ireland Assembly had been put in place.

11. There was a general consensus at the meeting that, if progress were to be made, it had to be between now and the end of February. After February, parties would be involved in the run-up to the May Local Elections and, following that, the marching season and the European elections would preclude any effective political dialogue for quite some time ahead.
12. Currie believes that the stature of Robinson among Unionists, including the Official Unionists, is growing steadily. He has little doubt that Robinson sees himself as a future leader of a united unionist party. Interestingly, Robinson mentioned in private to Currie that his "greatest asset" at the moment is Paisley's age.
13. Overall, the meeting confirms the present very strong desire on the part of Unionists to become involved in the process of dialogue and to avoid (again) being excluded from the political stage in Northern Ireland for what might well turn out to be an indefinite period ahead. Apart from that, and based on Currie's assessment, I do not believe that too much significance should be attached to it. The agreed proposal (para. 6) amounts in effect to suspension, though one of the formulas considered for putting it into practice (para. 8) might have some merit.

*DPG*  
Dermot Gallagher,  
27 October, 1988.

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